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Youth Apprenticeship: Developing Wisconsin's Workforce

By: Secretary-designee Caleb Frostman

Last week I was given the opportunity to address a group for Youth Apprenticeship Day at the Capitol. That's where I met Tom Martin.

You probably don't know Tom, but to hundreds of educators, students, parents, and businesses, Tom is part of a team at CESA 3 in southwestern Wisconsin that is passionate about providing quality work-based learning opportunities for students.

One of the longest standing and most successful work-based learning opportunities in our state is Youth Apprenticeship, a Department of Workforce Development (DWD) program created in 1991 that has served more than 25,000 Wisconsin students since inception.

Generally, high school is when students get their first taste of work, consider career paths, and begin developing their base skills, very much including essential skills, like problem solving, effective professional communication, customer service, resilience, and teamwork.

Coming from economic development, I've seen the positive impact that Youth Apprenticeship has had at local manufacturers in my town of Sturgeon Bay. The combination of hands-on, on-the-job learning that occurs in concert with classroom learning is essential for the greatest development and retention of those learned skills.

Ongoing economic expansion has presented our state and our nation's economy with a new set of concerns, chief among them finding a qualified worker for every open job. Youth Apprenticeship is an opportunity for companies to utilize to recruit, train, and ideally retain workers eager to learn.

With Wisconsin's workforce aging rapidly, all stakeholders are considering the importance of Wisconsin's youth in our overall workforce development programming.

Governor Evers took the time to listen to Wisconsinites about what's important to them, and that's why the 2019-2021 budget continues to fund and support Youth Apprenticeship.

This year, Youth Apprenticeship has a record 5,000 student participants and more than 3,500 supporting businesses. Due to its effectiveness in training and retaining quality workers, as well as engaging families, businesses, and the educational community, the Youth Apprenticeship program is rightly seen as a community builder.

As more and more students see the opportunity that Youth Apprenticeship provides, we are hoping to engage even more businesses into Youth Apprenticeship to hire highly motivated youth looking to develop their skills.

This year we've seen a noticeable bump in participation in Agriculture, Finance, Health Science and Manufacturing. We've also seen continued growth in newer Youth Apprenticeship areas like Marketing, Architecture & Construction, STEM, and the addition of a Business Management & Administration field. DWD is proud of and grateful for the diversity of Youth Apprenticeship programs offered.

And Youth Apprenticeship is effective. To date, 83 percent of students that completed Youth Apprenticeship have been offered continued employment by the employer that provided their on-the-job training. That's a testament to the hard work of the students AND businesses recognizing the value of their youth workers.

As someone tasked with developing Wisconsin's workforce, from youth to retirement and everywhere in between, I'm grateful for the passion that Tom and organizations like CESA 3 bring to work-based learning. Their enthusiasm for the work and its importance inspires our efforts at DWD to continue enhancing programming that delivers results for Wisconsin's students, our businesses, and our economy.

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